

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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ETHIOPIA: Interference in Relief Operations

**Summary**

US Embassy and other reporting over the last year reveals that Addis Ababa has used the famine crisis and international relief aid for military and political purposes. Despite professing cooperation, the Mengistu regime has frequently interfered with relief operations, undermining the credibility of its generally non-political relief commission. In our judgment, the Ethiopian government will continue to view Western-backed relief efforts with suspicion and manipulate aid operations to enhance its control of the country.

\* \* \*

The Ethiopian Relief Effort

Famine operations in Ethiopia are conducted through the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), which was established approximately ten years ago as a non-political organization. It was formed by the military government to coordinate relief operations in the aftermath of the 1972-73 drought in Ethiopia. Most senior RRC officials are Western-trained and

This memorandum was requested by Mark Edelman, Assistant Administrator for Africa, AID. It was prepared by East Africa Branch, Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division

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experienced in dealing with Western and international relief agencies. Until recently, Addis Ababa considered this a benefit since almost all relief assistance came from the West. Western presence in Ethiopia was kept to a minimum because the RRC was able to deal with natural calamities on its own. The commission, however, has been overwhelmed by the scale of the current natural disaster necessitating a large foreign presence to assist in relief programs. [REDACTED]

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The RRC's efforts to feed and care for the Ethiopian population, according to US Embassy reporting, have been affected by several factors over which it has little control:

- Skilled managers to oversee relief operations are in short supply.
- The country's highway system is primitive, and several million needy people are days from major highways or airstrips.
- A serious shortage of trucks and repair mechanics exists. [REDACTED]

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In addition to these resource constraints, however, we believe that RRC operations are hindered by government interference. In our judgment, the RRC's relief mission is undermined by Addis Ababa's fear that relief assistance will strengthen the insurgencies in the northern provinces of Tigre and Eritrea, the region hardest-hit by the drought. According to US Embassy reporting, for example, Addis Ababa strongly opposes the provision of relief aid to dissident relief organizations or any cross-border feeding program from Sudan. The US Embassy further reports that the regime also is delaying the expansion of government feeding efforts into rebel-held territory, despite an agreement between the RRC chairman and international food donors to initiate such a program. In our judgment, authorities in Addis Ababa fear that food will end up in rebel hands and that arms will be smuggled to the rebels under the cover of food deliveries. [REDACTED]

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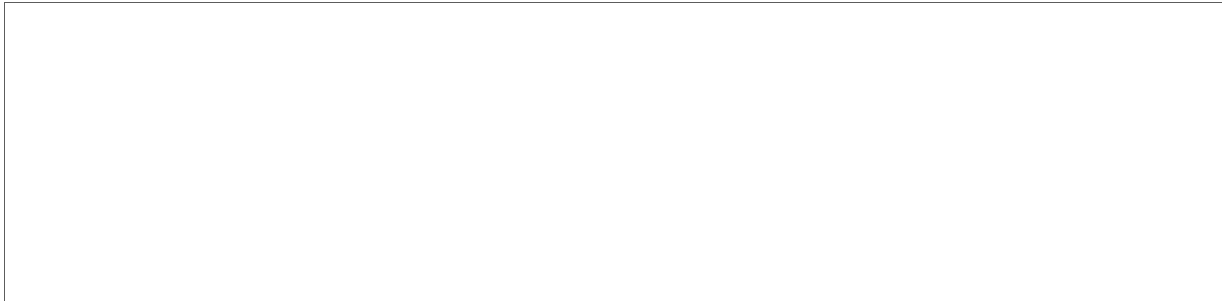
The Mengistu government's high priority resettlement program--designed in part to separate the local populace from the insurgents--has had a particularly significant impact on the credibility of the RRC relief operations, in our view. For example, the US Embassy reports that some peasants have been lured to feeding facilities by offers of assistance and then transported--often unwillingly--to resettlement sites in other regions of the country. At the same time, hundreds of trucks and several aircraft--that could be used to transport relief aid--have been used to move peasants from the north. Western observers also have noted the presence of large numbers of trucks at the new resettlement sites to support new arrivals and government workers, at a time when massive

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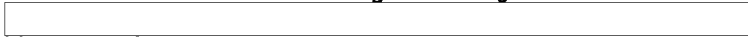
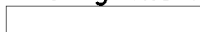


amounts of relief aid were backlogged in the distribution system. In addition, the Embassy claims that an unknown number of skilled government administrators have been diverted to manage the camps. 

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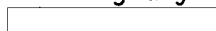
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Beyond Mengistu's concerns with the insurgency and possible political unrest, we judge that he also fears the RRC is being used by the West to subvert his socialist goals.  Chairman Mengistu and some other senior Ethiopian officials believe the RRC is "tainted" by its longtime association with the West. To ensure government control, the regime has assigned party cadre to feeding stations. These personnel are more responsive to regime direction and often override the ostensibly independent RRC leadership on policy matters. At the same time, various Embassy sources indicate that Mengistu believes the relief camps are being used by the West and the insurgents to propagandize and recruit members. He plans, therefore, to close down camps such as Ibbat over the next few months, forcing the refugees to return to their homes or accept resettlement. 

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### Prospects

In our judgment, Mengistu will remain suspicious of Western--and especially US--relief assistance, frustrating international efforts to assist and rehabilitate the population. The diversion of relief goods or vehicles to support government security and political objections is unlikely to end. We believe that Addis Ababa will continue to try avoiding detection by diverting from programs that are difficult for donors to monitor end use. The government will also persist in stonewalling any comprehensive feeding program that includes rebel-held areas. 

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: Interference in Relief Operations [ ]

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